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Integrating multiple representations: fighting asthma

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Abstract

This paper seeks to engage debates about integrating pluralisms regarding multiple forms/representations and how they might function smoothly if they are closely aligned. This paper offers, narrative poetry with an artistic impression aimed at seeing how these might interact with each other. Like poetry, visual images are unique and can evoke particular kinds of emotional and visceral responses. By offering narrative poetry together with an artistic representation it is not meant to de-value the importance of either, but it is aimed at seeing how these arts-based methods and creative analytical practices might unite as a narrative to offer new ways of 'knowing' and 'seeing'.

Keywords: *pluralisms, narrative poetry, narrative art, creative analytical practices*

Integrating multiple representations: Fighting asthma



Illustration I: “Fighting asthma” Owton, 2012, Charcoal, 297x420 mm, 130gsm white cartridge paper

When I was young, asthma; told I would grow out of it,
 Not the case with me; I seem to be growing right into it,
 Blooming into this stage; asthma’s really hit.

Loads of times, with a mate, running,
 At the end... WHOA... wheezing,
 Just keeping up with him; type of sprint running,
 When we stop, knowing,
 Legs he’d be stretching; the same I’d be doing,
 Also I’d be wheeeeeeezing,
 Calming down; waiting, knowing,
 Lungs are gonna be crazy going!

The aftermath part, waiting... for them to be settling.

That's what you do; not really thinking,

Gonna be affecting me keeping up with him,

Both struggling; hard; competing.

Cold nights running,

Lungs burst; legs burstin, everything's burstin

I wasn't thinking,

Asthma's gonna be stopping,

Probably taking me ages to get me back breathing,

After effects I'm gonna be dealing,

Not hours, minutes;

10 or 9 minutes,

Uncomfortable periods.

I dunno, part of me likes that,

Myself; I quite like pushing,

I like the idea of knowing,

I'm training; a real hard session,

Stopping to be sick; tough impression,

I dunno, part of me likes that,

End run, costing a lung,

No pain, no gain mentality,

I don't mind that.

An uncomfortableness, that's all.

Asthma will never cause me to keel over,

Probably does limit performance.

Fighting recently,

Affected grappling ability,

Asthma; worst summer,

I'm the coach; I'm better,

Struggling; feeling a bit, bit squashed up,

CRUNCHED UP.

Near to your max, breathing,

Pressure down on your chest; Panic! Gets me,

My way out. Tapping.

Remembering; disappointed feeling,

In myself for tapping; literally just tapping,

Just feeling uncomfortable a bit,

Tapping out, me.

Not - someone's gotten on top of you,

Not - actually done something to hurt you,

To make you go,

"Yeah you beat me"

Pretty good for the guys in the club to see.

I'm beating them up, usually,
Really enjoying it, seeing me
tap. Gave them bragging rights, probably!

Was it caused by asthma?
Was I just absolutely knackered?
Was part of me looking for a way out?

Like when I was a kid; camping,
Dad; a PE teacher,
Outdoor pursuit instructor,
One occasion; walking; Dad telling me not to do the full thing,
Kind of letting him down, I was,
Bit upset about that, I was,
Can't handle it with the big boys; wimping out,
Looking like a weed, looking like a wimp,
Daddy's looking after me; giving me a way out.

Sporty thing,
He's an asthmatic; can't keep up; wimpiness thing.

My asthma stories, as I recall,
Shame, giving up, being embarrassed,
Cross about it all,
Thinking...

Is it just an excuse...

through lack of heart,

That's all.

By encompassing a multitude of different forms/representations the drawing and poem might provide specific information about our existence and act as powerful indicators regarding multiple meanings embedded within our culture (Phoenix, 2010). In this case, whilst exploring the sensual nature of physicality involved in sport and asthma, when playing sport, there might be a contestation of identity hierarchies between asthmatic and sporting identities which may be enhanced given the strength of some people's athletic identities and the 'culture of risk' attached to many sporting cultures. Additionally, the metaphor of fighting illness, not 'lying down' to it, overcoming adversity, is pervasive in accounts of illness in western society (Frank, 1995). 'Fighting' illness is a way of talking about it, which is strongly culturally approved (Frank, 1995). This 'fighter attitude' seems to match a very culturally valued way of being in sport; *no pain, no gain, pushing the limits, never giving up, mind over matter*.

This is in response to the recent calls for integrating pluralisms; integrating multiple methods, forms/representations in qualitative research (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, and Dupuis, 2011; Denzin, 2009). I also wanted to represent people's stories in a way that blurred the boundaries between researcher and researched, self and other and which also 'blurs the edges between text, representation and criticism' (Denzin, 2010, p.29). It is important to understand and frame how these creative

analytical practices (CAP) (Richardson, 2000) or arts-based methods (Leavy, 2009) might be epistemologically situated. Denzin (2010), a leading figure in the qualitative community, argues for a performance studies paradigm: one, which ‘understands performance simultaneously as a form of inquiry and as a form of activism, as critique, as critical citizenship’ (p.18). ‘Performance is a way of knowing, a way of creating and fostering understanding, a method that persons use to create and give meaning to everyday life’ (Denzin, 2010, p.30). Denzin (2001) argues that we inhabit a performance-based, dramaturgical culture where the dividing line between performer and audience blurs, and culture itself becomes a dramatic performance. The move to performance has been accompanied by a shift towards a willingness to experiment with alternative new representational forms (Denzin, 2010). Engaging participants in this research was not a top-down process of gathering data, but a reciprocal relationship in which insights were developed and shared. Given this, narrative poetry and narrative art were appropriate and particularly powerful tools for achieving this aim.

I drew on the form of poetic inquiry that Prendergast, Leggo, and Sameshima (2009) refer to as participant-voiced poems which are written from interview transcripts or elicited directly from the participants and produced as narrative poems. This type of poetry is closer to storytelling (Leavy, 2009). The power of poetic representation (if done well) lies in its ability to create evocative and open-ended connections to the data for the researcher, the reader and the listener (Rapport and Sparkes, 2009). Poetic representation is designed to stimulate and encourage multiple interpretations which invite and allow readers a greater interpretive freedom to make their own conclusions so that they are able better to understand this as they transfer

this understanding into their own lives (Rapport and Sparkes, 2009; Sparkes, Nilges, Swan, and Dowling, 2003; Sparkes & Douglas, 2007).

Additionally, participants gave me photos which led me to include in the research. Therefore, I questioned how arts-based methods might be used together. Indeed, Chamberlain et al. (2011) argue that multiple methods function smoothly if they are closely aligned. Like poetry, visual images are unique and can evoke particular kinds of emotional and visceral responses (Phoenix, 2010). By asking participants to provide a photo that is meaningful to them, it offered an opportunity for them to use their bodies and the space around them to *show* rather than just *tell* about their lives (Riessman, 2008). Westcott (2007) highlights that drawings as opposed to photographs can allow participants to shape how they see themselves and are potentially seen by others, however drawings done by the researcher can provide visual interpretation and representation, offering a co-constructed creation developed from the researcher's drawing from the photo elicitation. Whilst Gold (2007) uses predominantly photography, he places a high value on researcher-created visual data as a way of 'gaining orientation' and forcing fieldworkers to engage and empathise with participants. This importance of close engagement and adopting a reflexive approach to researcher created visual data is a pivotal issue (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Furthermore, multiple methods encourages creativity and innovation, extends the scope and depth of data, demands time, forces reflexivity, deepens and intensifies relationships between researchers and participants and raises issues for analysis and interpretation.

The very nature of asthma and sport is arguably a very embodied activity. Sensorial experiences are important because sensory relationships are essential domains of cultural expression and communication and are the means by which

values are enacted (Phoenix, 2010). Many highlight the crucial role that sense play in how sport is experienced and understood (e.g., Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007; Sparkes, 2009) particularly those with asthma who experience ‘laboured breathing’ (Allen-Collinson, 2008). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) in particular argue that there might be a direct relationship between respiratory patterns and an athlete’s subjectivity which might produce emotional states and consequently raise issues of identity management. Narrative poetry and art might help explore personal and shared bodily-felt sensory experiences of asthma as well as other overlooked issues such as the *meanings* people give their sport and their asthma, *how* people might negotiate their identities, and the *way* people might become attuned to listening to their breathing in acute ways resulting from bodily-felt experiences. The following integrated forms of poetry and art attempt to capture the *whats* and *hows* and aim to *show* rather than *tell* (Riessman, 2008).

I recognise that by adding another dimension (the visual) I am touching on on-going debates about issues of representation, which appears to be about the prioritising and valuing of *verbal* knowledge over *visual* knowledge (Phoenix, 2010). Moreover, there appears to be a prioritising of the *written* word over *verbal* and *visual* word (Richardson, 1997). By offering a poetic narrative together with an artistic representation it is not meant to de-value the importance of either, but it is aimed at seeing how these arts-based methods and creative analytical practices might interact with each other and unite to offer new ways of ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing’ (Leavy, 2009; Phoenix, 2010). I hope that this stimulates debate surrounding visual representations whereby Harrison’s (2002) considers whether visual data should speak for itself.

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